

Positive Youth Development

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From the National Clearinghouse on Families and Youth Website

What Is Positive Youth Development?

The Positive Youth Development approach suggests that helping young people to achieve their full potential is the best way to prevent them from engaging in risky behaviors. Organizations and communities that promote Positive Youth Development give youth the chance to exercise leadership, build skills, and get involved. The self-confidence, trust, and practical knowledge that young people gain from these opportunities help them grow into healthy, happy, self-sufficient adults.

Positive Thinking Leads to Positive Results

When community members and policymakers harness the positive energy and initiative of youth, good things happen:

- Youth believe they can be successful instead of internalizing the negative stereotypes about them that often appear in the media.
- Youth engage in productive activities that build job and life skills and reinforce community-mindedness.
- Youth grow comfortable questioning and exploring their roles as citizens in a participatory democracy.
- In addition, adults who work closely with youth—and therefore see their dedication, responsibility, and willingness to learn—tend to view youth positively.

Positive Youth Development Takes Many Forms

Organizations and communities put Positive Youth Development into practice by allowing young people to help make important decisions about their own lives, the organizations that serve them, and their communities.

You can put Positive Youth Development into practice by:

- Recruiting young people to volunteer for local grassroots organizations
- Showing youth how to start their own newspapers or Web sites
- Asking high school students to co-teach classes with their teachers
- Teaching young people to conduct surveys on community and school resources
- Encouraging local businesses to sponsor job fairs and job shadowing days
- Inviting youth to serve on the board of a local nonprofit organization
- Creating a youth board that advises State or local government on issues young people care about such as violence prevention, transportation, and afterschool activities

Many local programs offer young people positive opportunities. The Boys & Girls Clubs of America, National 4-H Council, and YMCA of the USA, for example, are national organizations that promote the Positive Youth Development approach through their local program affiliates. Smaller organizations—such as local runaway shelters, afterschool centers, mentoring programs, and job

training sites—promote Positive Youth Development, too.

The Evidence Is Growing

The research supporting the Positive Youth Development approach continues to build. Since 1997, when General Colin Powell issued a challenge to every community in the Nation to make Five Promises to all young people, cities and towns across the country have started to see results. Young people who have the Five Promises — Caring Adults, Safe Places, A Healthy Start, Effective Education, and Opportunities to Serve — do better in school, are more likely to pursue higher education and enjoy better relationships with their peers and families. They are less likely to engage in risky behaviors, and are 5 to 10 times more likely to become productive citizens in their communities.

A Role for Everyone

Though the concept may seem simple, Positive Youth Development requires an enormous community mobilization. Everyone has a role to play:

- Neighborhood leaders and community members can involve young people in measuring how well the community supports youth, and then work together to improve services.
- Policymakers can engage youth in discussions about policies that affect them.
- Business leaders can teach young people the skills they will need for successful employment.
- Youth service organizations can encourage youth participation in every aspect of their work.
- Members of the media can help give young people outlets for expressing their views.
- Treatment providers can engage adolescent treatment recipients in service to others, for instance, as peer educators.
- Teachers and school administrators can ensure that school policies, procedures, and teaching methods engage young people fully.
- Faith-based institutions can involve young people in community activities.
- Parents can strive to engage their children in positive activities that nurture their talents, skills, and interests.

For more information call: 903-237-1019

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